

The Country Railroad Station in America

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Book Reviews

back spiritous beverages, given the unwillingness of politicians to stand up and be counted as supporters of strong drink.

Kyvig's volume constitutes a most important addition to the growing corpus of books dealing in a meaningful manner with the Prohibition episode of American history. It also provides a contribution to American Constitutional history in its fascinating description of the dilemma faced by those who brought about statutory legislative curbs on human behavior and then desperately sought to undo what they had done.

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The Country Railroad Station in America, by H. Roger Grant and Charles W. Bohi. Boulder, Colorado: Pruett Publishing Co., 1978. pp. iv, 183. Photographs, drawings, essay on sources, index. \$22.50.

Anyone who is interested in railroads and who reads about their history is aware that there is a flood of books on the subject. Unfortunately, this outpouring must be acknowledged as being, in the main, mediocre. H. Roger Grant and Charles W. Bohi recognize the problem and observe that "the few book-length works that deal with small-town stations lack either a narrative or an interpretive framework." (p. 177) One is naturally led to apply this yardstick to *The Country Railroad Station in America*.

The authors did not choose a narrative framework. The book is organized along rather broad geographical lines: Eastern U.S. to Western to Canada. There are only occasional chronological references. Neither dates of construction of stations nor dates of photographs are regularly included. An interpretive framework seems to have been the aim of Grant and Bohi. In the first sixteen pages they discuss the role of the depot in the community. While giving a few examples to clinch their argument that the station was the "community hub," they hardly exhaust the subject. The remainder of the work is devoted to "an architectural overview of the combination freight and passenger depot."

It is difficult to find much success in their effort. The lines of demarcation are so indistinct that one is not sure just what they mean to in-

clude. Stations are not limited to those in the country, as many suburban depots are included in the New England coverage. The standardized combination station is meant to be the point of focus, but numerous examples in all parts of the country are shown which are either not standard designs or are not "combination" in the true meaning of the term—that is, they did not combine freight rooms with passenger/baggage/express facilities. Even the "America" in the title is misleading, for, as the authors acknowledge (p. 24), the heart of the study is the stations of the Middle West. Certainly no one can rely on their coverage of other areas in the United States. Not only are there errors of detail (the Revere Beach, Massachusetts depot is assigned wrongly to the Boston and Maine line rather than to the narrow gauge Boston, Revere Beach and Lynn), there are inexplicable lapses in interpretation. Relying on Edward A. Lewis, *New England Country Depots*, Grant and Bohi conclude that the New Haven railroad had no standard station design. Yet John A. Droege, general superintendent of that very railroad, in his important 1916 technical work on *Passenger Terminals and Trains*, gives plans for a New Haven standard combination station which he notes had "been in use, with slight variation, at many points and for several years." And Grant and Bohi cite Droege elsewhere and list him in their sources.

But what about the Middle West, where the majority of the stations in the book were located? For certain lines, especially the Milwaukee Road, Chicago and North Western, Soo Line, Rock Island, Burlington, and other Granger roads, there are many examples. But even these suffer from incomplete analysis, either from the technical or the architectural point of view. Much more could have been said about the railroading functions performed in the stations and the implications these had for design. And one is not reassured about the quality of the "architectural overview" when words such as "bargeboard" are consistently misused, or when little is said about internal details of construction.

There are materials in abundance from Iowa. Of three hundred photographs in the book, forty depict Iowa depots. There are forty-nine plans and elevations included, of which at least seven show structures built by the Milwaukee Road in some twenty-eight towns in Iowa. But once again the reader is frustrated by the omissions of the authors. The Iowa towns in the drawings are, with a few exceptions, not indexed. And the drawings are reproduced to such a small scale and in such gray tones that a reading glass is necessary to use most of them. In addition there is no attempt to provide systematic and precise

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citation of sources; one must work with the acknowledgments, picture credit lines, and a one-page essay on sources.

The fundamental problem with this work is not that the authors are unfamiliar with their topic. Rather they proceed from the misconception that the general principles of station design are easily established and that their task is to present visual examples of the resulting structures. What is needed is a careful analysis of specific cases of station design and construction, relating the ideas of standardization and a combination structure to factors such as the date a particular line was built, the population of the towns along it, competing railroads, and the architectural styles then in vogue. Grant and Bohi have collected a great amount of material on the railroad stations of the upper Middle West; hopefully they will return to the subject in a more carefully prepared, scholarly, and therefore more useful volume.

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Book Notices

Tales from the Prairie, Vol. 4, by Dorothy Weyer Creigh. (Hastings, Nebraska: Adams County Historical Society, 1979. 282 pp., illustrations, appendices, index, \$9.95 paper.)

The author, noted for her book, *A Primer for Local Historical Societies*, published by the American Association for State & Local History in 1976, is a founding member of the Adams County Historical Society. The introduction to her book is very enlightening—telling of the history of the Adams County group and how they have moved to one of the best county historical groups in the nation from humble beginnings in 1965. This work consists of thirty-eight stories which appeared in the Adams County *Historical News* from 1977 to 1979. This is the fourth volume in the series and is well illustrated with historic photos. The highly-readable stories cover a multitude of topics ranging from wedding customs to brick-making. A real credit to local history.

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